CHAPTER 10

The Trong-nying Prison Farm

THE VILLAGE OF Trong-nying is about four days' walk from Lhasa, in the Drikung area, which was now part of Medro Gongkar county. It was formerly the estate of a land-owning family called Doe-trong (*rDo grong*). Generally speaking, as Tibet used to be a vast country with a small population, the cultivation of fields in some areas was alternated year by year, and the areas cultivated were the easiest to irrigate, so a large amount of potentially fertile land was left idle due to the difficulty of irrigation. Since there was a lot of uncultivated land in the Drikung area, the plan was to use the Drapchi prisoners' manpower to construct an agricultural unit (*Zhing rva*), and that is what our three groups of ten were sent there to do.

In Drikung, there were pastures in the upper valleys and fertile agricultural land in the lower valleys. In some pockets there were forests of willow (*Glang ma*) and ash (*Khred pa*) where, before the Chinese invasion, many kinds of wild birds and animals roamed free. The mountainsides were mostly covered with bushes like dwarf juniper and rhododendron, rockspray and barberry, and the fallow land was full of thorn bush (*Tsher ma skya tsher*), so it was a place where people who were free to do so could easily find the means of livelihood. However, the inhabitants were quite miserable in appearance, physically weak and with little regard for their attire. The finest product was an edible [mustard] oil that was light and durable, and in Lhasa, where oils from many different regions were sold, Drikung oil was considered the best.

We put up our tents on the riverbank near the village of Trong-nying. There were three prisoners' tents, one for the officials, and two for the guards, six in all. Our task was to collect and stockpile brushwood in preparation for the arrival of a larger group of prisoners. The daily quota was two loads,

which we were ordered to collect before midday. This was because during the twelfth month of the Tibetan calendar (January–February), there were often afternoon dust storms so fierce that people could not see each other even close up, and the guards feared that prisoners might be able to escape at such times. Since there was plenty of brush, it was not difficult to collect two loads, and we spent the afternoon doing so-called "political reeducation" inside the tent, so at first the work was physically undemanding.

After a few days, a group of us younger prisoners were selected to prepare the ground on an island in the river between Medro Gongkar county and a place called Dongpo-gang, where another Drapchi prison farm was planned. Being surrounded by water, the place was cold, and moreover could not be reached from any direction without crossing the water. At that time, we approached it from the north bank; the fast-flowing water was to the south, while the northern side was broad and shallow. It was evening when we got to the riverbank, and much colder than in the morning; but in any case, no one could stand the bitter cold of the river water in winter except a prisoner who was ordered to cross. That evening, we pitched the tent there and then, and slept. The next day we collected brushwood as before. As the place was surrounded by water, there was tamarisk wood (*'Om bu*) that we gathered with no great difficulty.

Early one morning a few days later, a messenger came from Medro Gongkar county to report that a team of trucks bringing equipment from Drapchi had arrived on the Medro side of the river and we had to come and collect it. We had to move at once, and Medro was on the south side of the river, where the water flowed fast. We looked for a fording place but found none. As we left the bank, the water was higher than waist level, and there were two or three channels to cross. It was sunrise, and the cold east wind that accompanies the sunrise during winter in Tibet started to blow. There were a great many sharp slivers of ice being carried along in the water, and on the way over, walking without loads, we tried to avoid them by dodging back and forth. When we climbed out of the water onto dry ground it was colder, and the first time, when we went barefoot, the sand and pebbles that stuck to our wet feet froze instantly, so that when we went to brush them off, skin and flesh came off together with the pebbles, which felt like burning.

When we reached the Medro bank of the river, just setting eyes on the huge quantity of equipment—work tools like picks and spades, ironware, kitchenware, and a new tent for the guards—made us despair. For the ten of us to transport it all across the river, there was no saying how many trips

we would have to make. On each crossing, in addition to a full load, we younger ones also had to carry one of the guards over on our back, and unlike before, under the weight of the loads and the guards we could not avoid being struck by the shards of ice in the river. They left wounds when they hit our legs, and red streaks of blood could be seen running in the water. But the guards on our backs had no difficulties at all, and when we swayed too much, or especially when we came close to toppling over, they grabbed hold of our hair and even our ears, threatening us to steady up. On reaching the far bank, some of the better guards handed out cigarettes to those who had carried them over while others scolded their bearers for walking unsteadily, and some prisoners even had to endure beatings there on the riverbank.

Anyway, since we could not complete the job with only a few trips, we had to keep going for several days, making four trips a day. There was little time to take our shoes off for each crossing, it wasn't easy to walk across barefoot, and, especially in the morning, if we went without wearing our pants and shoes we would be wounded by the ice. Not only were we without a dry change of clothes, at that time we were sleeping in a place surrounded by water in a worn-out tent that gave no protection against the wind during the month when temperatures were 13 or 14 degrees below zero. The prisoners who had no relatives [to bring them essential supplies] and had to stay in their soaked clothes throughout those few days aggravated their colds, kidney problems, and other ailments, becoming too sick to get out of bed, while others became deafened by the water and wind, and all of those employed in carrying became physically depleted. With their sallow complexions and bags under their eyes, they looked like the prisoners dying of starvation in Drapchi earlier on. Since I was able to fortify myself with the generous supplies of meat, butter, and other provisions that my elder sister had brought before my departure from Drapchi, apart from undergoing the severe cold and being unable to sleep at night from the roar of the wind and water in my ears, I did not suffer terribly. A few days after the carrying work was over, a brigade of Drapchi prisoners arrived, but although it seemed that some of them were to stay in that place, a sudden announcement came that instead we were all to move back to the initial settlement at Trong-nying. Of course the equipment had to be carried by manpower just as before, but this time there were more of us and as it was the start of spring, the water was not so cold. This time, however, I encountered a special problem.

There was a team of plowing yaks that had been brought from the northern pastures some time before, when we were preparing to work at

that location, that we were to use as pack animals on the move back. The yak herder was a former Drapchi prisoner whose sentence had been served and was now working as a prison employee, and another prisoner and I were appointed his assistants. This was because our remaining sentence period was less than the other prisoners', so we did not have to be accompanied by the guards. But I had no previous experience of loading yaks and had not even driven them before, while those yaks had never carried loads before. Worse still, as there were no saddles on which to tie the loads, we had to tie them onto their bare backs. First we had problems holding them still, then we had problems loading them as they bucked and shied away, and when we finally got going, they shrugged off their loads along the way, and especially in the water, so I became completely soaked [while trying to recover the equipment]. These exasperating difficulties were a special experience for me.

After moving back, our group of officials, guards, and prisoners stayed as before in tents near Trong-nying village, and as soon as the spring thaw came, we started digging up the empty land. There were about a hundred prisoners, and we just worked to the best of our ability, with no daily targets to meet, but soon a large number of additional prisoners arrived from Drapchi and we were divided into three groups. Thereupon, the officials allotted an unthinkably large area of land as our objective, which was to be dug, planted, and harvested within the space of a year, as well as the construction of a prison building and many subsidiary duties. Everyone had to undertake to complete all this work, and the work teams not only had to fix targets but were also ordered to compete with one another in exceeding them, so that the original workload of digging empty land was multiplied. In addition, we had to attend evening meetings for the criticism of those who failed to meet the set targets.

As a shortcut to achieve these targets, two or three like-minded prisoners would turn over one huge clod of turf at a time by digging together, which gave the superficial impression of great progress, but when we got around to breaking up the soil more finely, it gave us more work to do. In particular, at sowing time, groups of four or five prisoners had to pull heavy tractor plows over the field, and when they snagged on these unbroken clods or the roots of thorn bushes, the impact would make them fall over.

Anyway, that year we turned over enough wasteland to plant a thousand measures of seed (*Son khal* = approx. 28 lbs.) and harvested it, with only the prisoners' manpower, human labor unassisted by animals, not to mention machines. Agricultural labor tires both the body and the mind,

and the traditional saying of the elders that the defilement of working the earth (*Sa grib*) ages one beyond one's years really seems to be true. One may get fatigued while doing other kinds of work but, so long as one is fit, the fatigue wears off with rest, whereas agricultural labor in general, and especially that task of cultivating wasteland, was not simply arduous in the moment; by the time we returned to our tents in the evening we would either collapse from exhaustion immediately or go into a kind of motionless torpor, sleeping with our eyes open, like fish.

During the year or so I was there, the prison diet consisted of a regular supply of *tsampa*, and there were no deaths from starvation. I myself received food parcels from my elder sisters through others visiting prisoners in that area, and one time my eldest sister Losang Chönyi-la got leave from the Penpo state farm where she was working on road construction to come and visit me and brought me some good, nutritious food, so there were mostly no problems of sustenance.

One time, three of us with the least time still to serve, Dra Yéshé Tokmé of Séra-jé, Chimé Dorjé of Éma-gang Shaka-dékyi, and myself, were given tools, baskets, and so on and sent together with two officials to a valley over a pass from Trong-nying called Drikung Tsa, to gather willow canes. It was during the fourth Tibetan month, and as we climbed toward the pass on the mountain behind Trong-nying, the azalea and rhododendron bushes were full of flowers, and the air was pervaded with their scent and the delightful sound of the cuckoo's call. There was a nomad family staying on the pass, and their yaks and *dris* (females) were like ornaments adorning that mountain. It had been nearly four years that we had been in the constant presence of prison guards, so that day, with just two Tibetan officials and none of those "henchmen of the lord of death" nearby, I felt relaxed and joyful. We boiled tea and took our midday meal with the nomad family. As we entered their tent, the nomad couple became extremely deferential as soon as they saw the two officials, and served them, as well as the three of us to one side, with nomad products like buttermilk and whey as refreshments. It was the first time in more than three years that I had gotten to eat such delicacies, and the delicious taste is something I can recall even now.

As we were coming down the far side of the pass, we passed a mountainside enclave that had been ravaged by fire and all the vegetation burned, and as we discussed discreetly among ourselves how this fire could have started, the horseman who had accompanied us from Trong-nying leading two pack horses carrying the officials' bedding and food supply told us what had happened. There was a People's Liberation Army encampment nearby,

and they came here to hunt wild animals. The previous winter, a group of soldiers had used their machine guns to shoot grouse on this mountain, and the sparks from the bullets striking the rocks had ignited the dry winter grass, starting a fire. Local people had tried to put it out, but even from a distance the heat of the blaze was unbearable and they could not get near. Fortunately, after burning for a few days, it had died down by itself. It was said that the bones of many wild animals had been found in the ashes. In earlier times, there was a large herd of deer in the mountain willow groves above Drikung Tsa that used to come down in the summertime to feed on the farmers' crops and cause damage in the fields, and the villagers had to keep watch on their fields by night. Since the events [of 1959], they had been hunted by the PLA as well as the county and township (*Chus*) officials; those that had not been wiped out had fled over the hills to more remote places, and now none was left.

That is something I saw and heard in one locality, but generally speaking, it was around that time that the destruction of Tibet's natural environment began. Just like the saying, "Whoever associates with bad people may end up sharing their punishment," when the failed harvests in China led to famine in Tibet as well, soldiers and officials could destroy any kind of wild animal as much as they wished, and this was the most dangerous time of all for Tibet's precious wildlife. In the northern pastureland, for example, the Chinese army camps fitted heavy machine guns onto big trucks and chased after wild yak, wild ass (*kiang*), gazelle, and antelope (*chiru*), slaughtering them. Since there were great herds, they were not driven to extinction, but the fearsome wild yak is mostly solitary and never moves in groups larger than four or five, and being less plentiful than the wild ass and gazelle, it succumbed more quickly to excessive hunting. Similarly, after my release from prison I heard that the many deer and bears that once inhabited the mountain passes between Lhasa and the Drak and Trang-go valleys to the south were no longer to be seen.

We stayed happily for a few days in the monastery at Drikung Tsa, and ate together with the two officials at mealtimes. One day they took us to the upper part of that valley to scout for timber for the construction of the prison building at Trong-nying. The upper valley was largely forested, and on one side was a grove of mountain willow that had not been cut for generations and was said to be the residence of the local territorial deity. There was a small shrine to the deity in the grove, and many strips of wool and ornaments and so on hung in the branches of the nearby trees in offering. It was a place cherished by the local people. Nonetheless, a few days after we

had returned from gathering willow canes, the prisoners were taken to cut wood in the grove.

At that time, the propaganda and newspapers claimed that in civil society there was freedom of religious belief and local traditions were respected, but the reality was that without even asking the local people, they cut and cleared that forest grove that had been preserved for generations, and within about a month they had destroyed it altogether. In the same way, all the commonly owned wooded areas on the mountainsides around Trong-nying were eradicated by the prisoners just as the hermitages and groves of trees north of Lhasa had been, and even the willow plantations belonging to individual households were destroyed. Village people who lived in the vicinity of a Chinese army camp or official settlement particularly suffered losses of this kind.

That summer was mostly spent collecting and transporting building materials for the new prison, and the greatest hardship was cutting and transporting the wood from Drikung Tsa, because to cross the high pass behind Trong-nying and return [with loads of timber] from the forested areas on the far side, we had to walk sixteen hours a day. Our evening political education meetings were devoted to a campaign for the selection of prisoners whose standard of work performance qualified for the "Six Excellences." It was said that if you were selected, your sentence would be reduced. The Six Excellences were excellence in thought reform, excellence in labor reform, excellence in self-criticism, excellence in exposing the faults of others, excellence in unity [with the group], and excellence in hygiene. Prisoners had to declare whether or not they had personally fulfilled these criteria and to admit those on which they fell short, and these were commented on at the group level. Of course, those who had already been through numerous campaigns of this kind knew full well that the real purpose was to mislead and create internal divisions among the prisoners, but there were times when everyone was obliged to do their best to comply. Therefore, people admitted to shortcomings in the least serious points, like unity and hygiene, but claimed to be sufficient in the others.

But they say that "people have a hundred thousand peculiarities," and some found ways of courageously declaring it a sham and a deception by speaking ironically. For example, one of our fellow prisoners, the former lay official (*Shod drung*) Latok Surkhar Ngawang Puntsok-la, was a person of courage and conviction. When he was called upon to assess himself in the course of this campaign, he said, "It was because of fulfilling the Six Excellences that I formerly held a position in the Ganden Po-trang government, when I wore a badge of distinction and my horse was garlanded with

insignia. But with the changed circumstances my fate has been determined by others, and being without liberty even to go to the toilet, not to mention do anything else, I cannot qualify for even one excellence, only for [the proverbial] 'nine misfortunes.'"

Another prisoner, Nyi-dön the broadcloth merchant from Lho-ka Dra-nang, always wore a Chinese-style dust mask, regardless of the season, and people said it enabled him to do prayer recitation without being seen. When that suspicion was put about, he was subjected to frequent struggle sessions, but no matter what accusations were made against him, he remained totally silent throughout. When asked why he never said anything, he replied, "Because I make fervent prayers that through these struggle sessions I may absolve whatever harmful actions I have committed toward the sentient beings of the six realms, and since I only pray for all sentient beings to be happy and have no other bad thoughts, I do not hear what you are saying at all." He just took whatever was thrown at him, and not only during that campaign but all the time he was a target for victimization and recrimination.

At that point, I had no more than six months of my sentence to serve, and since I had learned how to avoid criticism and especially had gotten along with my fellow prisoners for some time, nothing was said against me during that period. I often used to be sent, unaccompanied by guards, along with the prison storekeeper and horse-cart driver to collect prison supplies like *tsampa* from places like Medro Gongkar county, Tangkya township, and Drikung Nyima Chang-ra township. The storekeeper carried our daily ration with him, so we could eat whenever we felt the pangs of hunger. The assembly halls of the monasteries were then being used to store *tsampa*, butter, edible oil, and so forth. In Tangkya township, for example, was the former Tangkya monastery, and the assembly hall was used as a granary. It was the same at the Dakpa Labrang in Medro and Drikung Nyima Chang-ra.

Except for places like Séra, Drépung, and the Lhasa Tsukla-khang, which retained an essential staff of monks, monasteries throughout the country had become like empty boxes, where not only the monks but also the statues on the shrines had disappeared. In the area around Medro Gongkar there had been a large number of minor monasteries and nunneries, and during the so-called Democratic Reform, the monks and nuns had not merely been forced to disrobe, but much more cruelly, issued one of a pair of lottery tickets and obliged to marry the holder of the corresponding ticket. Sometimes these couples were grossly mismatched in terms of age,

but they were forced to marry regardless of any personal preferences. I had heard such stories from imprisoned former monks while I was in Drapchi and had not really believed them, but during my several trips around the Medro area on supply duty for Trong-nying prison I heard them again, and I would like to appeal to any of those forcibly married at that time who are still with us to put their experiences into writing.

It was around then that the flames of a war between China and India were being kindled on the Indo-Tibetan border, and just like people all over Tibet, the prisoners at Trong-nying had unbridled hopes [of an Indian victory] and failed to disguise this in their outward behavior, with results that will be described.

During 1962 our daily work at the prison, now known as Trong-nying "Lungtrang" [state farm], was tilling the fields. One day when we were digging wasteland on the riverbank below Trong-nying village, we saw a large number of horsemen on the far side of the river heading for Medro Gongkar county, wearing greeting scarves (*Kha btags*) and apparently having traveled a long distance. We assumed that they were delegates from some meeting or other in either Lhasa or Medro county. The Democratic Reform period was coming to an end, a new series of administrative organizations was being set up in the cities and villages, and work meetings were continually being held in the agricultural areas, so the local representatives (*U yon*) and new leaders (*Tsu'u krang*) had to come to Medro Gongkar county to attend meetings. The scarves around their necks, which they might have received at such a meeting, seemed to confirm it. But after the first day, these horsemen kept passing in the direction of Lhasa every day for almost a week, until we thought that every man, young and old, and every horse in the valley of Drikung must have gone and, no longer believing that they were all attending a meeting, we didn't know what to think. It did not occur to any of us that a war could have broken out.

Not long afterward, it was reported in the *Tibet Daily* newspaper that there had been "Indian expansionist incursions in different sectors of the Sino-Indian border," and we heard from the prison horse-cart driver, a former Séra monk called Wangdü who made frequent trips to Medro Gongkar county accompanied only by the storekeeper and without guards, that the word in society at large was that war had broken out, and the large number of horsemen we had seen recently heading from Drikung to Lhasa were going to the front lines on the border to support the Chinese army by transporting ammunition and other duties. For us political prisoners, this was wonderful news and our greatest source of hope. Apart from those like

myself with four- or five-year sentences, the majority of the prisoners had sentences of more than ten years, like twenty, eighteen, or fifteen years, and in view of the prison diet and work regime, as well as lack of medical care and other facilities, they had no expectation of living that long. So most people felt that once the outcome of the war had been decided for better or worse, if things went well we could be liberated from our plight. While the newspaper represented it as a border conflict, we felt that in reality the Indians were going to use force to come to Tibet's aid and take back the entire country, wrongly believing that India had a better-equipped and stronger army than China. So with high hopes, we paid special attention to reading *Tibet Daily*, covertly exchanged views with trusted comrades, and waited for our wish to come true.

Normally, no matter how much the officials goaded us to study *Tibet Daily*, the idea of reading it during our spare time would have been out of the question, and even during the allotted evening study periods when one person read aloud, those listening would either fall asleep or make expressions of disbelief among themselves, and when the officials came around to check on us they very often found someone to scold or criticize. So when some people started reading the paper at their lunch break and even taking it with them to work, their way of thinking became obvious, and the prison officials could see that they "harbored empty hopes" about the outcome of the ongoing war. But the political education of the prisoners and even the discussion sessions continued as normal, as if nothing had happened. At that time, the prisoners used to idly gather on a sandbank by the side of an irrigation ditch running through the prison compound, where those who could read Tibetan explained to those who couldn't about the causes of the war and the relevant place names in the eastern and western sectors where it was being fought.

Then one day, while the prisoners were living in this state of anticipation, *Tibet Daily* announced that the "Sino-Indian border dispute" had been "resolved," and both sides had withdrawn to an agreed distance from the frontier. Before long, the local Tibetans who had been engaged in supporting the troops by transporting equipment and ammunition came home. Among them was the leader of Trong-nying village where we were staying; he came and gave a very long speech to the prisoners about how the "Indian expansionists" had been defeated, and even how many of the Indian front-line troops who had been taken prisoner had embraced the "humanistic ideology" of the Communist Party and did not want to return to their own country. Finally, he told us, "Some of you may have 'harbored empty

hopes' about the war, but that is just a daydream. Instead, if you confide in the People's government you will receive leniency, for you have no other path to follow than offering your heart and soul to the Party and People's government and giving the rest of your lives to 'Reform Through Labor.'" The great expectations we had had for that war were an ignorant fantasy, and this was the disastrous outcome.

Then suddenly one day an extremely vicious Chinese leader called Ma Guocheng arrived at Trong-nying from Drapchi prison number 1, accompanied by two regular officials, and on the afternoon of the same day all the prisoners were summoned to a big meeting. Ma Guocheng began by summarizing the achievements of the Trong-nying farm during the year or so since it had been established, and the progress in labor and thought reform. He then stated the Party's policy for prisoners that all actions of thought, word, or deed contrary to the spirit of labor and thought reform that might have been committed since our arrival at the farm, whether by ourselves or others, direct or indirect, would be treated with leniency if confessed and with fierce retribution if withheld, that "worthy deeds" [of confession] were the best way, and so on. More specifically, he said that many of us had demonstrated by our behavior during the Sino-Indian war that we cherished empty hopes, and these would have to be cleared up during a forthcoming political campaign. It was called the "Great Winter Training Session" (*dGun sbyong chen po*) and would go on throughout the two winter months. All other work would be suspended for that period, and under the new regulations prisoners would be restricted to their own groups of ten and could only go to the toilet in line with the rest of their group, twice a day. Even within the group, conversation between two or three individuals was not permitted. If we wanted to make a confession, we could approach the prison official concerned or do so at a meeting of our group, or best of all, put it in writing and hand it in.

The campaign started from the end of work that day, and the prison became a more terrifying place than before. Of course, the prisoners' empty hopes for the war had been disappointed, but they had not foreseen the imposition of a political campaign of this kind, and before comrades had a chance to exchange words or encourage each other, contact was cut off. Nonetheless, during the four years since 1959 we had witnessed the attempts by the Chinese authorities to turn Tibetans against each other and test us in all kinds of ways. In particular, people knew very well that two prisoners involved in the same case were never kept together but confined separately, and during questioning they would tell both suspects, "Your

friend has admitted everything and turned over a new leaf," so for a while, the prisoners tried to appear enthusiastic in thought and labor "reform," but resolutely denied anything about having empty hopes during the war. But then there was always the anxiety for those who had been involved in any incident that their colleagues would let them down, and except for examining the behavior of one's associates from a distance and winking at them in encouragement, there was no other way of alleviating the apprehension. Things went on like this for two weeks or so, until one of the prisoners made a confession involving a list of about forty names.

That person had been chief among those commenting on the newspapers and had behaved the most flagrantly. His name was Kyi-shong Jo-la A-nen, and he belonged to a family called Gyatru-ling Néchung from the Gongkar area in Lho-ka, whose members had traditionally been selected for government service. His level of written Tibetan was as high as could be, and he was an old man of wide experience who had gained familiarity with the situation of all social classes in the old society and could tell you about any place in Tibet, but especially about the south [where he was from]. Many people from Lho-ka were arrested and imprisoned in 1959, as happened throughout the country, and he was among them. He seemed to be a loyal Tibetan; he got along easily with others, both young and old; and it was extremely interesting to hear him talk about his varied experience, both in the past and more recently, which is why the prisoners used to go and listen to him talk in their free time. While at Trong-nying I also went frequently to listen to him. Fortunately, however, another member of the Gongkar Gyatru-ling Néchung family called Shérab Menbar, one of A-nen's relatives, was in my group, and he told me about A-nen's past and advised me not to associate with him. Because I had cut off relations with A-nen after that, my name was not on the list of those implicated in the wartime incident, but several of my close friends were in touch with him and were implicated.

Thus, having no chance to speak to or reassure one another, we were in a state of mutual suspicion. Fortunately, because work had been suspended for many days at a time and both the prisoners' and the officials' kitchens ran out of firewood, they had no other option than to send all the prisoners out on the mountain to collect more. The groups of ten could not be kept separate while on the mountain, so this was the best opportunity for people to talk with their comrades. I went after Géshé Dorjé Wenbar-la of Drépung Go-mang, who was my closest friend and confidant, and without looking at me directly he positioned himself to meet me surreptitiously. Géshé-la asked, "What have you said about us?"

"I only have two months left of my sentence," I replied, "and whether I get out or not is in your hands. I have consistently regarded Géshé-la [you] as a great spiritual guide (*dGe ba'i bshes gnyen*)."

These words pleased Géshé-la. "You are certainly the student of a fine teacher," he said. "I will keep my mouth shut. But for the earth and the sky, no one will find grounds for suspicion [of what was said] between us. I will pray that you get safely out of prison. Now go on ahead," and our mutual suspicion was cleared up. Then on the way back down I reassured Kun-ga-la, the steward of my comrade Dzasak Kétsul-la the military commander, and Chimé-la, a former officer in the bodyguard regiment, so we had no doubts about each other.

Still, the campaign continued to get harsher, and we could hear the noise of angry confrontation going on from about eight o'clock in the morning until midnight. The campaign was so harshly accusatory that even those who were not directly implicated would unanimously have preferred to continue with the normal regime of laboring to meet extreme work targets on scant daily rations, in the freezing cold, driving wind, or excessive heat. Most of the prisoners in our group of ten were former monastic officials from Lho-ka, such as abbots, chant masters, disciplinarians, managers, and so on, and there were a few laypeople from Lho-ka; since they were already well aware that A-nen was a troublemaker and well-known rogue and had not been involved with him, we were the least affected and did not have to face any specific accusation.

Then one day a Chinese official whose family name was Chang came to our group quarters, together with a Tibetan official called Nyima and two guards, and told us all to go outside. They searched my bedding, clothes, and possessions and those of my close companion Géndun Dondrup, a former monk of the Döl Sung-rab-ling monastery in Lho-ka, very thoroughly, and even removed the dried tamarisk bush stored under the earthen platforms on which we slept. I had thought that the several searches of the prisoners' bodies and possessions since that extraordinary campaign had begun were due to Chinese suspiciousness in general, but from this special search of both of our bedding it was certain that we had been accused by someone. Besides being in the same canteen group, Géndun Dondrup and I were close confidants who told each other everything, but if there had been any potential problem he had not mentioned it up to now, so I thought I was probably being falsely implicated in some other problem because my sentence would soon be over and they wanted a pretext not to release me on time. As I pondered these possibilities, they removed a sharpened shovel

blade with no handle from among the tamarisk bush under the bed, and the officials and guards at once demanded of Géndun Dondrup, "What are you doing with this?" That relieved my fear that I myself was to be accused, but still my canteen group had been implicated, and all the members of our group were asked why they had attempted to conceal such a thing and not reported it, and told to unambiguously identify his associates. Yönten, the former chamberlain of the Samyé protector temple and leader of our group of ten, and Shérab Menbar were taken aside and asked who was his companion and to which other group members he was closest. And since I naturally came under suspicion, I was filled with anxiety that I would not now be released at the end of my sentence.

The inquiry into Géndun Dondrup began that evening. Although I really wanted to ask him about it, we never got the chance to talk at leisure. Géndun Dondrup had sharpened and hidden the shovel blade because, on his own admission, he had had great expectations of the Sino-Indian war and had believed that the talk of a dispute on the Indian frontier was to disguise the fact that Indian troops were coming to help Tibet. But he thought that in the case of an Indian victory, the Chinese authorities would deport us political prisoners to China, if not massacre us, just as had happened in Chongqing to the Nationalists trying to flee to Taiwan after the defeat of the Guomindang. Therefore, once the Indian forces advanced into Tibet, we would have to stage an uprising. This could be done on the frequent journeys we had to make across the pass from Trong-nying to Drikung Tsa; we would kill our guards and escape through Drikung into the ravines of Kongpo [near the Indian border]. When the officials asked him how many others were involved in the plan and who the leader was, he replied that he didn't know how many were involved, because the plan had circulated from one individual to another, and none of those involved knew who all the others were, not to mention who the leader was. He told them that Puntsok Wangdü had inducted him into it, but did not give any other name.

Puntsok Wangdü was the former treasurer of Dak-la Gampo monastery in Dakpo, and they were both serving twenty-year sentences. He was the first to tell the authorities about the plan and name other members of the group. Puntsok Wangdü had been an associate of A-nen and was among those named by him. In fact, it seemed quite obvious to me that he was someone who pretended to be courageous and distinguished, and the impression I had of his character when he repeatedly came visiting Géndun Dondrup was not favorable. In any case, he faced a lot of struggle after being implicated by A-nen, made confessions during that fierce campaign,

and named other individuals besides Géndun Dondrup whom he had inducted, and since others also named him in their confessions, the whole story came out.

I had no relationship whatsoever with Puntsok Wangdü, but he told Géndun Dondrup, "Don't let your canteen group member Tubten Khétsun know about this. He is too young to be reliable, and since he is due for release soon, if he were to know, he could report it if he was worried about anything standing in the way of his release, so we need to be careful," so Géndun Dondrup did not let any of his canteen group know. But from the way he said, "No problem," [Puntsok Wangdü] could tell that Géndun Dondrup and I had the same political viewpoint, which he told the authorities, and because of that I became falsely implicated and had to face a lot of questioning both within our group of ten and separately from the officials. "Since I am due for release soon, I would have no reason to get involved in such a dangerous business," I said. "On top of that, as you can see, my family members have been doing everything possible regardless of the difficulty in order to look after me, and even if I were capable of betraying the People's government, I could never turn away from repaying the kindness of my beloved family. You may think that Géndun Dondrup and I were political allies, and even conspirators in this uprising, but if you cut my neck for that, only white blood will flow out" [a reference to a well-known story about the last words of Pönchen Shakya Sangpo, who was falsely accused of murdering Pakpa Rinpoché], I told them with an air of desperation. And since Géndun Dondrup told them that we had no other connection than being in the same canteen group and no one else said anything, they didn't take my interrogation any further.

After two months of numerous harangues over political problems during that campaign, the time for spring planting came around and we went back to work as before. No one knew what punishment those implicated in the problems would receive, but since most were already serving eighteen- or twenty-year sentences, it was anticipated that the lesser offenders would receive life terms and the others execution. When we went back to work, the authorities suspected that those people might try to escape or even kill themselves, and their groups of ten were given the responsibility of keeping an eye on them. When I got to ask Géndun Dondrup about the matter, he told me, "The reason I didn't tell you about this was not at all because I didn't trust you. Those of us with twenty-year sentences that will keep us in prison for the rest of our lives can only turn to such desperate acts. You are nearly out, so I didn't want to get you in any trouble. That's why I kept

it from you. Then, I didn't know exactly who else was involved, although I knew from Puntsok Wangdü that A-bar-la of Purbuchok Labrang was one. We were going to introduce ourselves to each other when the time came. So far, I did not have to mention any other name than Puntsok Wangdü."

Anyway, during that so-called Great Winter Training Session we had argued back and forth [in struggle sessions] about what we had expected from the Sino-Indian war, about those who had insulted the Chinese government or made agreements with others to try to escape, and most serious of all, about the discovery of the plan by Géndun Dondrup and others to escape after massacring the guards. The fundamental reason for that discovery lay in our failing to stay calm when the war broke out and expressing our hopes in an obvious way, as well as the attempt by the despicable A-nen to lessen his own punishment by implicating many others. That was one outcome of the expectations we had for that war, which is still one of the most valuable lessons I have learned in my life.

Once the campaign was wound down, we started to prepare for spring planting. Since there was not much of my sentence left to serve and I had not been implicated in any problem, I tried to galvanize some of the ordinary officials in our brigade by reminding them that my sentence was about to end and I was due for release, but apart from writing it in their notebooks, I got no reaction. Then, after about a month, two higher officials came from Drapchi, a Chinese whose surname was Hao and the Tibetan Ba-pa Késang. They had come on account of the several political developments that had been taking place at the Trong-nying prison farm. I presented the copy I had of my sentence document to the official Ba-pa Késang and requested to be released on time. This Késang was one of the senior prison officials; he had a passive temperament and spoke and made judgments well. He told me, "This can be referred for approval, and we will know the answer before long." A few days later, they called me in and told me to pack up my bedding and other things to go back to Drapchi, and meanwhile not to make contact with any other prisoners. While I packed my things, one of the ordinary officials stayed with me in case I tried to speak to the others, so my earlier promise to my close friends that I would carry their messages or requests out if I was released was frustratingly reduced to empty words. They may have thought that I was being secretive in order not to jeopardize my release, but in any case, with no chance to do anything more, I was put in a truck that evening and sent to Drapchi.

It was about eleven o'clock at night by the time we got there, and I was put in cell 24. The prisoners were already asleep, but the leader of that

group had them move this way and that to make a space for me to lie down. Then, since my release was virtually granted, my head was still spinning with various ideas about what I should do next when dawn came. As soon as the signal came for the prisoners to get up, I went out hoping to meet some of my acquaintances while washing my face and hands, but although the Drapchi regulations seemed to have eased a little since I was last there, those with whom I was familiar smiled at me but did not approach to exchange a few words. I wondered whether they were reticent because they had heard that many people had suffered during the political campaign at Trong-nying after being implicated by their fellow prisoners and assumed that I had been one of the informers. I was thinking that I should explain the situation clearly to my friends when the morning tea break ended, the prisoners lined up with their brigades to head off for work, and the officials in that brigade said that I should go to work with the others. Since there was no one I knew in that brigade, I found it particularly hard to pass the time that day.

After we had finished work, my closest comrade, the [former] monk official Jampa Tendzin-la, came looking for me. He told me that there was something I had to be told, but Losang Mönlam-la would do that. Likewise, when I went looking for my dear mother's associate Ri-sur Ama Yangchen-la, she showed no joy that I was about to be released, but told me with a heavy heart to let her know if I needed anything. Then, as I was thinking that I had to find out what was up, the [former] monk official Losang Mönlam-la arrived. He was the son of Shölkhang Épa Yöndak Tendzin Dorjé-la, who had given me extra work tokens while I was at Nga-chen, had been a secretary at the emergency headquarters in the Norbu Lingka during the uprising, and after his arrest had contracted lung disease and stayed in the hospital. He took my hand, saying, "Dear friend, I have something to tell you, so prepare yourself. Recently your uncle the chief secretary was brought to the Detention Center here from the Tibet Military District prison. Not long after, he came to the sickroom with a stomach ailment, and on the second day of the new Tibetan year, he passed away. Of course you will be upset, and we are also very upset that one of the old generation of first-class government servants has gone, but it could not be helped. However, while he was in the sickroom I was nearby and was able to attend to him, sit with him, and tell him whatever I knew about what was going on. Likewise, many other former government officials and patriotically minded people in the prison came to see him both openly and covertly, and he very warmly gave us his encouragement. His death coincided with the Tibetan new year,

and this year there was a special holiday in the prison with a cultural show that we were to attend, so there was some sense of observing the new year according to our own tradition, and we even wore new clothes instead of the usual ones. But as soon as that sad news circulated among us, we left the place where the show was being held and removed our festival clothes as a mark of respect. In short, we paid him the respect and veneration due such a veteran government servant of distinguished courage and altruism."

"What's the use of regret now?" he concluded by way of encouragement. "We just have to pluck up the courage to live if we have to live and to die if we have to die." For a while I couldn't formulate any thoughts of either joy or sorrow. Previously, when my elder and younger brothers and sisters brought me extra food, they would say that everyone was fine, and that they could go once a month to the TMD prison with extra food for our uncle the chief secretary and elder brother the palace steward and get a written note from them in reply, so I had figured that going to visit my uncle and brother would be the first thing I would do after being released. But with that unfortunate news, my anticipation vanished instantly. What really filled me with regret was that my uncle had passed away no more than two weeks before I got back to Drapchi.

During the next few days I stayed in Drapchi, and many friends came to offer their consolation and best wishes, until the morning of March 21, 1963, when the official Ba-pa Késang gave me instructions for my release, together with a batch of documents including my release certificate and letters of recommendation for a residence card (*Them tho*) and edible oil ration, and told me to go straight home. After I had hurriedly rolled up my bedding and effects, Késang escorted me to the main gate of the prison. It was the moment when most prisoners were lined up in the compound ready to leave for the morning's work and, inspired to see me being released alive and well, having survived that period of great danger and hardship in one piece, they waved at me in greeting. Thus I set out on a new life in changed circumstances, and whether or not the masses lived in happiness in the New Society as was constantly claimed by the Communist Party's propaganda, as far as I was concerned, as long as I was not at odds with its regulations and had food to eat and a place to live, I resolved that I would earn on the strength of my own abilities to repay the kindness of my loving elder sisters, and returned home in that spirit.

However, as will be seen, and quite contrary to those expectations, life in civil society involved great physical and mental hardship and, at times, suffering and terror even greater than I had experienced in prison.